

## Economic Development Subcommittee Meeting Minutes

May 4, 2022

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<b>EDC Members:</b>	Councilor Melanie Hamblen, Chair; Councilor Cobi Frongillo, Vice Chair; Councilors Glenn Jones & Patrick Sheridan
<b>Other Members of the Steering Committee:</b>	Bruce Hunchard, Zoning Board Chair; Greg Rondeau, Planning Board Chair; Beth Wierling, Planning Board Clerk
<b>Other Town Staff:</b>	Jamie Hellen, Town Administrator; Alecia Alleyne, Assistant to the Town Administrator; Bryan Taberner, Director of Planning and Community Development; Amy Love, Town Planner

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Chair Hamblen called the meeting to order at 5:49 p.m. and read announcements. Chair Hamblen stated that this is an EDC Plus Steering Committee meeting.

### Agenda:

#### **1. EDC + Steering Committee Discussion: MAPC “Franklin For All” zoning reform project for Franklin Center, including the Downtown Commercial District and surrounding neighborhoods**

Chair Hamblen introduced the meeting as a chance for the Steering Committee to pause and discuss the Franklin For All project - the data that was gathered from the survey, how the project is progressing, if it's moving in the right direction, and take questions and comments - before moving forward onto the next phase of the project. TA Hellen commented that it is a good time to pause and allow the Steering Committee a chance to have this dialogue.

Chair Hamblen opened the floor for discussion:

- Ms. Wierling asked for clarification on the timeline. Tonight's meeting is our opportunity to get questions and comments in. May 16th is the next forum at the Black Box, when MAPC will present their recommendations for zoning. It would be good to have a chance to review and comment on recommendations before they go public.
- Mr. Hunchard asked what the May 16th forum will be about, what is its purpose. Ms. Love commented that the purpose is to hear MAPC's zoning recommendations, and gather feedback on them. MAPC is currently working on their draft, which will be provided to the Steering Committee prior to the forum. We've already received input from the survey, the first public forum, and other focus groups, which is all being considered in the MAPC's recommendations. Tonight we are looking for feedback from the Steering Committee and a consensus on whether we are moving in the right direction.
- Mr. Rondeau commented that he thinks we should be looking at the outskirts of town; places that haven't been developed yet. Survey results reflected that people weren't looking for housing downtown. He asked if we have met the MBTA Community housing requirements of 1,800 units, and stated that there are currently projects being reviewed by the Planning Board and others coming soon which will contribute. Mr. Taberner commented that the focus of this project has been the downtown commercial district and adjacent neighborhoods. People are welcome to comment and give ideas on the outskirts, but these are outside the MAPC's scope and their report isn't likely to include these areas. TA Hellen discussed that we are not restricted to downtown zoning changes; it's just the area we are focused on right now. The outcome could be that we tweak a few things to check a few more boxes that the State is looking for, and then look at other areas of town. It's also possible that recommendations that come out of this report could be applicable to other areas of town.
- Councilor Frongillo discussed that we shouldn't lose sight of the larger picture of rezoning the downtown for reasons that will benefit Franklin. To improve Town finances we should be building our density out from the middle of the downtown, where infrastructure already exists, and where we get high return on investment per acre, per piece of infrastructure. He also discussed residual benefits of rezoning.
- Councilor Sheridan commented that we should focus on walkability for its convenience and positive impact on health and environment. We should also keep space between buildings and the streets that they are on.

- Councilor Jones discussed the need to come up with some collective ideas that we can all agree on and meet with property owners on how to move forward. Our ability to change things depends on our ability to change the zoning. We need to think about what we can do as a community to benefit the property owners who have the ability to make changes, and narrow down types of businesses that will spark growth. Mr. Hunchard asked what sort of businesses would achieve this result and named some of the various businesses that have occupied the downtown in the past. Chair Hamblen commented that this is less about what types of businesses should come into the town and more about what types of buildings can be built.
- TA Hellen commented that the Steering Committee should define problems and achievable goals, and apply solutions. Examples of problems to address could be the need for Affordable Housing and the types of businesses being attracted to downtown.
- Mr. Rondeau discussed whether it could be an option to offer tax incentives to business owners to clean up some of the buildings downtown.
- Ms. Wierling discussed the points she feels are important in this process: Density - how new buildings will look in these spaces and how abutters will be affected; Height of the buildings downtown - one or two story vs. five story; How to attract businesses to our downtown versus big box stores; How to provide more resources to the Franklin Downtown Partnership for promoting spaces and supporting businesses. Chair Hamblen agreed that modeling of different downtown layouts would be helpful. Councilor Frongillo commented that we currently have two or three story buildings and he thinks that's where we should stay, and should only go taller if there are incentives such as Affordability.
- Councilor Jones commented that we can set the zoning and it is already up to five stories. Everything boils down to marketability. No one will invest without incentive. We should think more like a city. Councilor Jones used buildings at Clark University as an example of how we shouldn't limit ourselves in Franklin.
- Resident Rick Saccone commented that he'd like to see the Davis Thayer School building turned into the new police station.
- Councilor Frongillo gave a reminder on the rezoning planning process - MAPC gives recommendations to Steering Committee for review, then escalates to EDC to review, then escalates to Town Council.
- Ms. Love provided detail about the forum logistics and format - MAPC will present draft overview of recommendations then take feedback from public. Steering Committee will receive info to review prior to the forum.
- Mr. Hunchard discussed that we should streamline the development process; special permits by Planning Board delay the process. Chair Hamblen agreed and mentioned that streamlining has been a focus all along based on feedback from many people that the process needs to be easier. Mr. Rondeau discussed that special permits help neighboring houses because they provide us with more control to prevent a five story building from being built where it doesn't fit. Chair Hamblen commented that both are valid points and that's why we need to discuss. Ms. Wierling commented that the special permit issue is a separate topic; some projects don't need one but some do. Criteria could be reviewed. TA Hellen discussed that this conversation needs to continue in the weeks and months after we receive the final report from MAPC. These issues are complicated and making these decisions will be one of the key parts of this process.

Chair Hamblen accepted a motion to adjourn. Motion was moved by Councilor Jones. Motion was seconded by Mr. Hunchard. Chair Hamblen took a roll call vote. Approved 7-0. Meeting adjourned at 6:43 pm.